Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Wood duck family Lake Joanna - photo by Noel Young

Challenge Bird Count

By Chris Timewell

For more than 15 years, the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club has participated in the Challenge Bird Count. On one day in the first weekend in December each year, groups from across Australia aim to detect as many bird species as possible within a 25km radius of a designated central point. For the Castlemaine area, the Market Building is considered to be our central point.

We recently received the detailed national results from 2018. A summary is provided in the table below.

Region	# of groups	# of bird species detected	# of individual birds
Greater Melbourne	3	152	8,485
Country Victoria	13	253	73,967
NSW	3	98	1,061
Queensland	4	226	12,963
TOTAL	**23**	**365**	**96476**

There are many participating 'teams' making up the overall Castlemaine group, also including representatives from BirdLife Castlemaine and Connecting Country. The aim is to have each team covering as many of the possible habitats and locations within the greater Castlemaine region as possible.

A total of 107 different bird species were detected in the Castlemaine region in 2018. This was the same number as was detected in 2017, and well up on 2016 (84 species). The number of individual birds detected in 2018 was 1,840, an increase on both 2017 (1723 individuals) and 2016 (1212 individuals). Almost all of the bird species detected by Castlemaine were also detected by other groups elsewhere in Victoria or interstate. However, Castlemaine was the only group in the country to have Powerful Owls on their list.

All of the sightings made by Castlemaine teams were also entered into **BIrdata**, thereby making an additional significant contribution to bird conservation and

knowledge. Birdata is the repository of bird sightings from across Australia, and has been in operation since 1998.

Many thanks to the coordinators of this national event; the volunteer representatives from BirdLife Australia (Adriana Bianchi and David Ap-Thomas).

This year, the club will again coordinate teams to make up an overall Castlemaine grouping. Teams can be made up of as few as 2 people, but are ideally 3 to 5 people. Each group should also have at least one experienced birdwatcher. However, it is certainly an activity where beginners and intermediate level birdwatchers can make a meaningful contribution, and also have an enjoyable day of birdwatching and exploration of the local area. There are many opportunities to learn and share birdwatching skills and experiences.

In 2019, the teams can undertake a search on either Saturday 30 November or Sunday 1 December. There is also flexibility to search instead on other nearby days if these are unavailable due to other commitments or poor weather. It is up to your own availability of you'd like to search for the whole day, or just part of it.

Contact me (c_timewell@hotmail.com) if you would like to join one of the Castlemaine teams. Alternatively, you may have some friends and family that can form a team together, and then you can contact me to discuss where to search on the day (so you are not overlapping in the same area with other Castlemaine teams).

Editor's blurt

At the last meeting **Paul Bates** of DELWP brought us up to speed on the current strategic bushfire action plan. Since the cessation of the controversial government policy of control burning on a quota basis, a much more nuanced approach has been devised, taking into account environmental values, and with asset protection priority given to the more immediate surrounds of towns. This risk based approach is guided by a public consultation process, with the plans under constant review.

Consultation input across the state clearly showed a preference for a balance of preventive action with protection of inherent values of public land, and that private land should be included in preventive measures.

Plans were shown with public land divided into three zones; asset protection as a red zone, a "bushfire moderation zone" in orange, and in green a "landscape management zone" not to be burnt unless there is a good reason. This green zone was gratifyingly large in the surrounds of Castlemaine. It includes 'high value exclusion zones' where threatened species are recognised.

It is important to note that the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas is used to assess environmental values in this context, so groups such as ourselves should make sure that knowledge of local threatened species is up to date on that Atlas.

The last time **David Cheal** addressed our club in Feb. 2017, he was critical of the former policy of quota burning for asset protection, [see article by Peter Turner in CN March 2017] and perhaps his expertise in this area played a part in the eventual adoption of a more intelligent approach. At the September meeting he returns to talk about the success of regeneration projects in the Mallee.

Our guest speaker for September is DAVID CHEAL

Habitat Restoration in the Mallee – major landscape improvements over the last 25 years or so

There has been a campaign to control and reduce browsing and grazing pressure in the Mallee Parks for a few decades now. We know how much time, effort and budget was spent on these campaigns, but have these campaigns been successful? Have the habitats and the natural environment generally responded positively? Where exactly is recovery evident? What have we learned about such long-term degradation and long-term oriented recovery? This presentation reports an objective assessment of recovery and future directions to further this encouraging process.

David Cheal is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for Environmental Management, School of Health & Life Sciences, Federation University Australia.

SEANA in Castlemaine

is fast approaching!

The committee is still in need of volunteers to assist either at the venue or assisting excursion leaders. If you can spare any time over the four days please let us know.

NB: **Early deadline for articles** for October CN is September 20th for distribution before SEANA

September Observations (1941)

George Broadway

Some of the specimens sent to Mr Crosbie Morrison of "Wildlife" magazine in September 1941. "Wildlife was a nature magazine which was published from Oct 1938 up till the early 1950's. In 1941 some specimens were being sent in for the first time but in later years I was surprised at the number of times the same specimens continued to be sent in, suggesting readers had not read the earlier account. This then is what turned up in Spring 1941.

INSECTS

Colac: Fierce-looking, but harmless except to ants and other small insects, an Ant Lion. (Described previously)
The larval form of a Lacewing, it digs a pit fall in loose sand and waits buried in sand at the bottom till an unwary ant happens to fall in. When the ant tries to escape the Ant Lion flicks grains of sand at it, causing it to fall back into the pit and into the waiting jaws. A member of the order *Neuroptera.*

Somerville: Hairy Gum Moth caterpillars, *Antherea*. Similar to the Gum Emperor Moth but hairier and the adult is slightly larger.

Coburg: Thrips on the Daphne leaf. Sprays are available to deal with them.

Reservoir: Specimens which look like blue-grey eggs are the mature females of the Wattle Scale, a degenerate insect which has no wings and spends its adult life fixed to a wattle stem, sucking the sap.

Marnoo: Painted Apple Moth chrysalis. The caterpillar is dark, hairy, and eats leaves voraciously, a pest in orchards and gardens. The adult female is wingless and lays her eggs on the surface of the cocoon. [See Aug '17]

Geelong: The creeper on the fence is evidently a convolvulus; the caterpillar is the Convolvulus Hawk Moth. The "sting" on the tail is harmless, it is probably

used to force a way through earth and mulch when the caterpillar is ready to pupate. [See April '17]

Horsham: Long-horned Grasshopper [See Aug '19] Usually known as Tree cricket. Feeds on wood but being solitary it does little damage. Is harmless but the large jaws could give a serious nip. Also Yea, Geelong, Dimboola.

Cranbourne: Your description "Like a piece of tapestry" aptly describes the beautifully marked Ghost Moth [see Aug '17]

Bentleigh: Ribbed Case Moth, a type that uses scientific ribbing instead of sticks to keep its home in shape. [See Oct '16]

Bentleigh: The long thin insect found in the muddy dam is the Pond Measurer or Water Scorpion *Ranatra*. [See Mar ''18.] A member of the bug family *Hemiptera* it can give a painful prick with its strong beak.

Frankston: Gum Sawfly larvae [Sep '16] Eggs are laid in the bark of a tree and they assemble in large masses on the twigs in the daytime before feeding on the leaves at night. If disturbed that raise their heads and tails and emit an unpleasant fluid to repel enemies. The adult is like a large stout wasp. Also Melbourne

Fitzroy: Woolly Bear caterpillar of the Coachman or Leopard Moth which frequently attacks garden plants.

E.Melb: Cocoon of the Gum Emperor Moth; the caterpillar is large and blue-green with brilliant orange and blue tufts growing to about 10 cm long. The moth which will emerge, sometimes after years, is fawn in colour with conspicuous "peacock-eye" markings on the wings. [See Mar '18.]

Kanya via Stawell: The large pinkish woolly creature from the gum tree is a female Mealy Bug, one of the wingless sap-sucking insects. The male is much smaller. [See July '16]

BOTANICAL

Wentworth: Native Quinine, Mallee Willow, Mallee Split-heart, or Weeping Pittosporum. *Pittosporum phillyriaeoides,* a graceful tree of the Mallee and Riverina. (Some years ago I found a stand in Lakey's Road but I fear that they have fallen victim to road clearing) The indigenous inhabitants used it medicinally, all parts of the plant contain a very bitter principle which is said to be useful in certain feverish conditions.

Keysborough: Basket Fungus or Lattice Fungus *Clathrus.* It is surprising to break one of the balls when it is just ripe - the large basket-like spore-carrying body either jumps out like a jack-in-the-box or else slowly rises until you begin to wonder when it is going to stop. This basket rolls about in the wind spreading spores. [Nov '16]

King Island: Kangaroo Apple, native to a large part of Australia and reaching the status of a weed.

BIRDS

Sea Lake: The little bird with the two long tail feathers which nests underground is the Rainbow bird, *merops*. It comes south in the spring and returns to warmer climes in the autumn. (a.k.a Bee-eater)

SPIDERS

Rupanyup: A Bird-dropping Spider or Orchard Spider. Previously mentioned many times.

Darlington: Satin-back Nephila, one of the most beautiful web builders.

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BirdLife Castlemaine District Branch – Twelve months On

Judy Hopley

The newest branch of BirdLife Australia was officially launched at the Castlemaine Botanic Garden's Tea rooms in July 2018. At a Special General Meeting a couple of months later, the Convenor of BLC, Jane Rusden, reported as follows:

"Our beginnings

In 2017 it was recognised by Tanya Loos, during a discussion we were having about bird monitoring, that we needed a BirdLife Branch in this region. Our reasoning was that we already have so many keen birders and environmentally concerned landowners combined with the need to future proof everyone's efforts and the amazing progress that's been made for our local indigenous flora and fauna. When locals take ownership, outcomes are usually optimum. And so the process of forming Castlemaine District Branch began.

It has taken us almost a year to get to this point. Tanya and I had discussions with Graham Dent at BirdLife Ballarat and attended the annual BirdLife Branches Conference in Melbourne. Tanya used her networks and put out the word and we had a local meeting of interested folk. Without those attending that initial meeting, none of this would have happened. We brain stormed and threw ideas about culminating in a draft application to the BirdLife Board, which ultimately failed. Back to the drawing board, more meetings and we tighten up our application focusing on all the BirdLife board's stringent criteria. We had to put a strong case forward for our region because it's so amazing and the people in it are also an incredible resource and that's what got us across the line. However when there are already 16 branches in Victoria compared to 1 in the whole of Western Australia, we had to prove ourselves. I have to say Fiona Blandford and the staff at BirdLife were and still are, incredibly supportive. Finally, in May we were awarded branch status by the BirdLife Board.

Launch

In July of this year, in conjunction with the BirdLife Roadshow, we launched. On a cold winters day Uncle Rick and Cain performed a moving welcome to Country; BirdLife impressed us with their presentation on how to advocate for birds and nature laws; Brendon Sydes clearly outlined why nature laws are important, where they are failing and what to do about it; and Beth Mellick put forward the case for Swift Parrots, once a common sighting in this region. Beth also showed us some of Deb Worland's Swift Parrot DVD. Then we all ate delicious food and had a chat.

Since then we've held monthly bird walks that have all been very well attended. We've seen plenty of birds too. Our walks leave from Continuing Education building, Templeton Street, Castlemaine at 8:30am, on the first Saturday of the month. Our eNews, Facebook page and group emails to our Birdlife members keep the birding community of the district informed about our activities. Walks are very relaxed and friendly and we welcome and encourage everyone no matter their birding experience. For those that are interested in monitoring, we will also be doing 2Ha 20min area counts using the Bird Data app.

Why our region is unique

Our region is unique and that's largely to do with the people in it. Whilst we are situated in the country, we also have folk originating from cities and built up areas. This gives us an unusually broad skill base in our community. To some extent, this plays out on the landscape, which in turn is benefiting our avian populations. We are lucky enough to have some good quality bush areas both on private and public land. Our region supports Key Biodiversity Areas which are nationally and internationally important. Second only to gully habitat for optimal bird biodiversity is revegetating land, where practices such as direct seeding of indigenous natives has been done by environmental groups like Connecting Country and individuals. We are comparatively rich in the revegetated areas. There are also many properties protecting older growth bush.

Our unique position in the landscape, the communities resources and environmental effort

have positioned us perfectly to showcase via bird monitoring, the success that can be had for conservation and our beloved birds.

Our future

A regional BirdLife Branch has the ability to give locals a nationally and internationally recognised voice. We can coordinate with and add to the bigger picture whilst looking after our own. It all starts with the humble but powerful monitoring tool, the 2Ha 20min area count, and using it to target our approach. Whilst there's always species that need our protection, the Swift Parrot for example, our region is also a success story. The Hooded Robin is holding its own, elsewhere it's in decline. Bird walks are a great way to start as you can do serious science, without it feeling like its serious because the bottom line is we enjoy a pleasant walk in the bush with friends and making friends, over our shared passion, birds".

Since Jane gave the above report, BLC has continued to organize successful bird walks on the first Saturday of the month, including a "breakfast with the birds" event before the February 2019 walk. Joint walks have been held with Ballarat BirdLife branch and with the Friends of Bald Hill Reserve, Kyneton. On the forthcoming October bird walk members attending the SEANA spring conference being organized by CFNC, will join local bird watchers to observe our wonderful woodland birds at the Rise and Shine Nature Reserve at Sandon.

A successful workshop was held recently on the BirdLife Australia Birdata application. Participants had the app explained and demonstrated. They then had the opportunity to use the app to record the birds sighted on a 20 minute, 2 hectare survey. Further workshops are planned for 2020.

A program is also being developed to familiarise local school children of all ages with the importance of local bird life. Relevant material is being gathered and contact is being made with local schools. It is exciting to announce that the first two bird sessions will be held in early September at Newstead Primary School.

Significant progress has been made since our launch towards co-ordinating bird data surveying undertaken by various groups in the district and to making a map plotting all repeat surveys in the Mount Alexander Shire area.

Like and follow us on our Facebook page:
https://www.facebook.com/BirdLife-Castlemaine-District-246773012585580/

Contact us at castlemaine@birdlife.org.au if you would like to be added to our eNews list.

Become a member of BirdLife Castlemaine District by joining our parent, BirdLife Australia: https://support.birdlife.org.au/birdlife-membership

Birds in England and Wales

Peter and Rosemary Turner

Our seven weeks in the UK visiting our elder son and his family during our grand daughters' school holidays is nearly over. Overall a memorable visit, except for bird sightings. We've been based at a house in North Oxford which we stayed in 5 years ago and have seen many fewer species and fewer birds in the garden this year, consistent with the ongoing reports from RSPB on declining numbers of most British birds. Little flocks of House Sparrows, but no Dunnocks (Hedge Sparrow); Blue and Great Tits, a few Robins, and one group of Long-tailed Tits; but many more Wood Pigeon, large and noisy, and several Red Kites, now common. We spent a few days in Wales with my bird-watching cousin, but no notable sightings

except stunning views of trained raptors and an owl at the British Raptor Centre in the grounds of the National Botanic Gardens north of Swansea. The Natural History Museum in Oxford has a series of display cabinets of British birds for typical environments – woodlands, coast, town and suburb, etc – with the name of each bird tagged with a small sticker: Green (status OK); Orange (declining) or Red (in danger). Very few, sadly, have green stickers; too many have red.

Last week, local bird watching friends took us to RSPB's Otmoor Nature Reserve near Oxford, with fields that flood after winter rain and snow, filling some ponds and lagoons. There is an excellent Wetlands Watch bird hide, and screened viewing spots overlooking a large, reed edged lagoon. An excellent morning – 32 species – and I wished that I had brought my telescopic lens for the camera. Except for the Little Egret, which only arrived in England in 1989, but is now well established, the order and spelling in this list is from The Observer's Book of Birds by S V Benson (Warne & Co. 1965) which Rosemary purchased in 1968 when she started to get interested in British birds when we lived in Oxford for 4 years.

After lunch at a pub in the Chilterns, with a beautiful view of green beech woods, Rosemary noticed a small raptor on a post. Our friend John identified it as a Merlin – the smallest British falcon, rarely seen, on the Red List of threatened species – a memorable ending to a most enjoyable birding day.

Bird List for RSPB Otmoor Nature Reserve 23/8/19

Cormorant	Coot	Whinchat
Grey Heron	Lapwing (hundreds!)	Whitethroat
Little Egret	Snipe (2)	Chiffchaff
Mallard	Wood Pigeon	Dunnock
Grey Lag Goose	Kingfisher	Greenfinch
Canada Goose	Crow	Goldfinch
Mute Swan	Great Tit	Linnet
Red Kite	Blue Tit	Bullfinch
Kestrel	Coal Tit	Chaffinch
Pheasant	Wren	Reed Bunting
Moorhen	Blackbird	

Birds of Sutton Grange August 2019

Nigel Harland

Spring is Sprung, the grass is riz, I now know where the Cuckoos is!

Eastern Spinebill, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Superb Fairywren, Red-browed Finch, White-browed Scrubwren, Australian Magpie, Australian Raven, Laughing Kookaburra, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Long-billed Corella, Crimson Rosella, Striated Pardalote, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, New Holland Honeyeater, Welcome Swallow, Red Wattlebird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, House Sparrow, Galah, White-naped Honeyeater, Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo, Pallid Cuckoo, Fantailed Cuckoo.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Wed September 11 – **Wildflower Wanders** commence at 4 p.m.

Fri September 13 meeting: speaker DAVID CHEAL on 'Habitat Restoration in the Mallee – major landscape improvements over the last 25 years or so'

Sat September 14 field trip: TBD

Wildflower Wanders continue on Sept. 18, 25, and Oct. 2

October 4 – 7 SEANA in Castlemaine*

*Please note – there is no general meeting planned for October

Fri November 8 meeting: speaker ELAINE BAYES

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Ron Wescott) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2019
Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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